

ASSESSMENT OF MASS MEDIA USAGE FOR FARM INFORMATION BY FARMERS IN AFIKPO
LGA OF EBONYI STATE: IMPLICATION FOR INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION
TECHNOLOGY (ICT) APPLICATION TO AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER

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ABSTRACT

The overall objective of this study is to assess the use of mass media for farm information by farmers in Afikpo North LGA and implication for ICT application to agricultural technology transfer. Multi-stage random sampling was used to draw the farmers involved in the study. Primary data were obtained by means of interview schedule and analyzed with frequency distribution, percentages and 4-point Likert-type scale. Results of the study showed that radio is the most used mass media source for farm information (66.7%) by the farmers relative to television (20.8%), print (12.5%) and telephone (0%). On the other hand, it was revealed that information on crop production was favoured by mass media (70.8%) against other aspects of agriculture. The major constraints to use of mass media for farm information were indicated to include; lack and inconsistent supply of power (3.5), financial constraints (3.8), language barrier (3.0) and time of programme presentation (3.1). The outcome of this study implies that the use of ICT for farm information is extremely low as it is basically limited to radio broadcast. Sustainable, application of ICT to agricultural technology transfer in Nigeria can be realized when such issues as erratic and inconsistent power supply, enhancement of farmers' knowledge of and access to telephone and internet facilities, sponsorship of agriculture radio and television programmes in the peoples' local languages by NGOs and others, and adequate funding of extension organizations to enable them acquire ICT components, are sufficiently addressed.

KEYWORDS: Mass-media, Farm Information, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Technology Transfer, Farmers.

INTRODUCTION

At all levels of human society, good communication is absolutely imperative. A well-informed society is a mobilized society because it is information literate, more responsive to government policies and eager to participate in the nation's development programmes (Folorunso, 1987). Therefore, the primary means of sustaining agricultural development is through generating and disseminating relevant information to farmers (Oboti, 2005). Mass media are channels of communication which can expose large numbers of people to the same information at the same time and within a short space of time. They may include media which pass on information through the use of sound, moving pictures or print. Ani (2007) stated that extension services use mass media because of the high speed and low cost with which information can be communicated over a wide area.

We are in the middle of information technology revolution. The fast advances in this field are rapidly changing the way people have been living on this planet. This development has virtually shrunk the world and has affected almost every walk of life. The information technology is tremendous power that could be harnessed by organizations for the benefit of mankind. Agricultural extension services can exploit this potential to strengthen their own capacities and to educate the rural populations who have access to media. The extension organisations in developing countries have two major problems when it comes to having face-to-face contacts with the farmers and researchers: first, physical distances and second, lack of transportation facilities (Qamar, 2002). This development, therefore, underscores the need for enhanced mass media use in

agricultural information dissemination in Nigerian rural societies.

Over the years, policies and implementation strategies have been formulated and projects and institutions established by the Federal and various state governments to enhance farmers' agricultural production and improve rural life. In spite of all these efforts, attainment of self-sufficiency in food production has remained a mirage in Nigeria. It was observed that farmers were neither adequately nor properly informed about innovations and programmes to be applied by them to achieve improved productivity and enhance their standard of living (Aboyade, 1987). Holistically, it seems that mass media has not been adequately and properly utilized to complement face-to-face contact with extension agents in farm information dissemination for farmers.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to assess the use of mass media for farm information by farmers in Afikpo North LGA of Ebonyi State and implication for ICT application to agricultural technology transfer. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- (i) determine the level of use of available mass media for farm information by the farmers;
- (ii) determine aspects of agricultural production that information are sourced through mass media;
- (iii) identify constraints to use of mass media for farm information by the farmers.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Afikpo North LGA of Ebonyi State. It is comprised of five main autonomous communities, namely; Akpoha, Amasiri, Afikpo, Ibii/Oziza and Unwana. Three-step multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the respondents for the study. In the first stage, four communities were randomly selected from the five communities that make up the local government area. This was followed by random selection of three villages from each of the selected communities to sum up to twelve villages. Finally, out of each of the twelve villages ten farm households were randomly selected to give a sample size of one hundred and twenty (120) respondents for the study. Interview schedule was used to elicit information from the farmers while frequency distribution, percentages and 4-point Likert-type scale were used for the analysis of generated data.

RESULTS

The results are presented according to the objectives of the study.

Level of Use of Available Mass Media for Farm Information

Data on major mass media sources for farm information were elicited from respondents and analyzed in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents' Distribution on Mass Media Use for Farm Information

Mass Media	Frequency of Response	Percentage
Radio	80	66.7
Television	25	20.8
Print (journals and bulletins)	15	12.5
Telephone	-	-
Total	120	100

Source: Field Survey, 2007.

Data analysis in Table 1 indicates that most of the farmers (66.7%) utilized the radio programmes as main mass media source of farm information. This is ranked next by television (20.8%). The print media constituted only 12.5% of the mass media used for farm information by the respondents while none of them source farm information through telephone calls. This result suggests that electronic sources are better mass media alternative for farm information possibly due to their appeal to more sensory organs than the print, relative cost advantage over other sources and less dependence on users' literacy level.

Aspects of Agricultural Production Covered by Mass Media

Data were analyzed to determine main aspects of agricultural production covered by mass media.

Table 2: Respondents' Distribution on Aspects of agricultural Production Covered by Mass Media

Aspects of Agriculture	Frequency of Response	Percentage
Crop Production	85	70.8
Animal Production/Fishery	5	4.2
Crop Processing	10	8.3
Agricultural Marketing	20	16.7
Total	120	100

Source: Field Survey, 2007.

Data analysis indicates that crop production is the most favoured agricultural activity (70.8%) in mass media, while animal production and fishery are least covered by mass media (4.2%). This trend shows the tendency of agricultural extension efforts bias for crop production against other aspects of agriculture in Nigeria.

Constraints to Use of Mass Media for Farm Information

Responses were elicited on farmers' perceived constraints to use of mass media as source of agricultural information and presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Constraints to Use of Mass Media for Farm Information

Constraints	*XS	Decision
i. Language poses barrier to use of mass media	3.0	Accept
ii. Method of presentation constitutes a problem to use of mass media		
Time of programme presentation is not convenient for most farmers	2.8	Accept
iii. Lack of/inconsistent power supply limits use of mass media		
Financial constraints constitute a problem to use of mass media	3.1	Accept
iv. Lack of formal education limits by capacity to source information through mass media	3.5	Accept
v. Inaccessibility of mass media constitutes a problem to the use		
	3.8	Accept
vi.		
	2.0	Reject
vii.		
	2.3	Reject

*XS = Mean score

Source: Field Survey, 2007.

Table 3 reveals that the most limiting factor to use of mass media for agricultural information by the farmers is financial constraint (XS = 3.5). Other perceived constraints in rating order include lack of /inconsistent power supply (XS = 3.5), time of programme presentation (XS = 3.1), language barrier (XS = 3.0) and method of agricultural programme presentation (XS = 2.8).

Implication of ICT Application to Agricultural Technology Transfer

Several studies including the CTA-sponsored study on rural women's access to public and private extension services (Arokoyo, *et al*, 2002) have revealed that the village level extension agent is the most effective source of information for farmers but certainly not the most efficient in terms of cost and coverage.

The Extension Service, therefore, must be appropriately supported with the use of ICT. Unfortunately, the study has indicated that the radio has been the only ICT extensively used for agricultural information delivery (66.7%) and supported by the television (20.8%). Telephone use in farm information delivery, even with the introduction of global system of mobile (GSM) communication in Nigeria, is very insignificant to non-existent. It can be concluded that the current ICT use in farm information access is extremely low especially as it affects the farm information users, the farmers.

Despite the worldwide ICT revolution, extension organisation and clientele seem not to be fully "ICT-ready" due to such factors as poor ICT infrastructural development as indicated by few rural telephone lines and networks, limited and unstable power supply, and high cost of telephone services. Other possible constraints to ICT application to agricultural technology transfer include limited access to computer and internet facilities by both farm information providers and their clientele, as well as poor-funding of extension service.

For application of ICT to agricultural technology transfer to be realistic, it is recommended that:

- (i) energy expansion programme of the current administration in Nigeria should be beefed up to accommodate intensified rural electrification schemes;
- (ii) extension organizations should be provided with internet and other ICT components;
- (iii) rural radio and television programmes should be sponsored by both extension and non-governmental organisations and presented at time of the day when it will be convenient for farmers to enhance their participation;
- (iv) such radio and T.V. programmes should be presented in the people's local language and in a manner that will reflect the farmers' socio-cultural and economic background;
- (v) programmes must avoid the stereotype crop biased extension pattern to ensure balance of emphasis through promotion of other aspects of agriculture such as livestock production, agricultural marketing and processing;
- (vi) deliberate policy considerations should be made to enhance farmers' knowledge and access to telephone and internet facilities at subsidized costs.

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